BILL CLINTON, GERMAN ROMANTIC
JAMES W. CEASER

the weekly Standard

JULY 14, 1997 $2.95

CAPITALISM WITHOUT LIMITS

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James Stewart's America
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The Meritocracy Dodge
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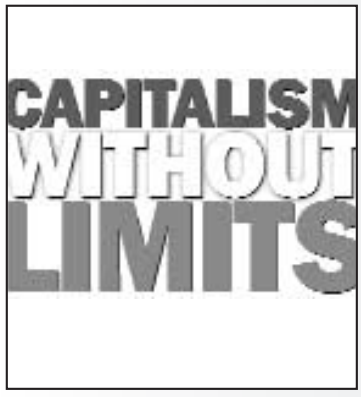

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Joycelyn Elders Strikes a Nervemag

In the nether-precincts of the Internet, Joycelyn Elders—hired by Bill Clinton for her candor, then fired by him for candidly suggesting that schoolchildren be taught the joys of onanism—is a great heroine. The "JackinWorld" website, for example, is "dedicated to former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders." JackinWorld is the self-described "ultimate masturbation resource." It includes illustrated "Jackin How-Tos" for boys and girls. Both of these, um, self-help manuals, incidentally, were recently accorded full constitutional protection by the Supreme Court's landmark Communications Decency Act decision. Just as the founders intended, we're sure.

Anyway, it turns out Joycelyn Elders admires the Internet as much as the Internet admires her. She now appears in all her glory in *Nervemag*, a new webzine about sexuality. Her maiden essay, "The Dreaded 'M' Word," is a thousand-word hymn to the "universal sexual practice of self-pleasure." It "cultivates in us a humble elegance," she says. It "just may render heavenly contentment in those who dare."

For instance. Dr. Elders reports that she has "an enlightened friend" who has wisely "taught her preschool-aged daughter about her anatomy." One day, the mother and child looked at themselves in the mirror together. Then, in the evening, friends came to dinner. Dad asked the little girl what she'd done during the day. "Of course," Elders writes, she told him the truth: "She and mommy looked at their vaginas." But "hers was prettier," the girl proudly announced; "Want to see?"

Sure, there are "privacy" issues raised by this story, the good doctor acknowledges. But the overriding moral is: "It is never okay to shame children for natural inquisitiveness or behavior." Because "that shame lasts forever."

It's really too bad Elders has already been fired, because it would be a pleasure to see her fired again.

Bowles May Stay

Don't count Erskine Bowles out as White House chief of staff yet. He's been telling everyone he wants to return to North Carolina and his investment-banking business. But President Clinton has a way to keep him in Washington: entitlement reform. Bowles, says a senior White House aide, is bound to be excited by the challenge of making sweeping Social Security and Medicare reform a part of Clinton's legacy, and the president plans to take up this issue in the fall.

Also, there's no logical successor to Bowles as chief of staff. Budget chief Franklin Raines would have the inside track, but Clinton prefers that Bowles stick around.

Dick Armey's Good Deed

It's a maxim in Washington that no good deed goes unpunished. It seemed to the Scrapbook, therefore, that we should praise a genuine good deed when we came across it.

The deed was done by House majority leader Dick Armey on behalf of the Washington Scholarship Fund, headed by a young activist named Douglas Dewey. The fund provides scholarships to low-income District of Columbia children to attend the private school of their choice. It's currently helping some 225 kids from families with an average income of $15,000 go to over 60 area schools. The fund is able to pay half the tuition for these schools, up to $1,500 a year, partly because it insists that the families, however poor, come up with half the tuition themselves.

What Armey did was ask his own donors to give money to the fund at an event he headlined on June 26. The restaurant event raised more than $100,000, which will cover an additional 90-plus scholarships this fall. Armey sought no publicity for his efforts. And by troubling his own donors to give additional money to a good cause, he did something most politicians never do: He asked his donors to do something for others rather than give money to him. Well done.

Franklin's Judas Goat

When President Clinton created his special commission on race, he turned to Duke University's John Hope Franklin to lead it. The appointment was greeted

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with near-universal approval, for Franklin is one of the most lionized historians in the country. Two years ago, Clinton awarded him the medal of freedom.

Franklin deserves more skeptical scrutiny, and he got it last week from the editors of the *Daily Oklahoman*, in the scholar's home state. They uncovered an interview he gave recently to a publication of the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities. Asked about Justice Clarence Thomas, Franklin said, "You always have such people in any group. . . . I suspect they may be Judases of a kind . . . betrayers . . . opportunists, immoral opportunists. It's very tempting, I suppose, for people of weak character to be co-opted by the majority that can use them. They are rewarded in one way or another. If not on the Supreme Court of the United States, then some other way. So many people have a price, and it's not unusual, it's not surprising. Some blacks have a price. It's just tragic when anyone sells themselves out, whether they're black or white or yellow."

If the president is serious about reconciliation—as he constantly claims to be—then maybe he ought to have as the head of his race squad someone who accords those who disagree with him a little more respect than a comparison to the betrayer of Jesus Christ.

Post-birth Idiots

In a throwback to the grandly loony feminism of the 1970s, the New York state branch of the National Organization for Women is denouncing what it brands the "Criminalization of Pregnancy" act.

This state bill—a rational response to the murder of several small children by drug-addicted mothers—would create the presumption that an infant born with drugs in its bloodstream is neglected. Under current law, social workers cannot so much as monitor such a baby until further evidence develops that it has been abused.

But don't bother NOW with rational responses. It knows a threat to its anti-child dogma when it sees one. The "hare-brained" bill, NOW says, is unconstitutional because it "repeatedly refers to embryos and fetuses as 'children,'" thus insinuating into state law the dangerous notion of "fetal rights," and because it violates the ban on illegal search and seizure by drawing conclusions about a mother's behavior from an infant's "toxicology reports." Besides, the bill is sexist: It is silent about "the genetic effects of paternal drug use and abuse on sperm."

Compliments to the bill's sponsors, assembly members Stephen Kaufman and Nettie Mayersohn, who met this challenge with the respect it deserved: They announced their conversion. NOW's statement, they said facetiously, convinced them to abandon their excessive concern for "post-birth fetuses" in favor of the real victims: abused sperm! They appealed for survivors of sperm abuse to come forward and tell their stories. And they promised to make state law conform with NOW's view that "post-birth fetuses, beaten to death by drug abusing parents, are not really entitled to any protection."

Kaufman and Mayersohn, by the way, are both pro-choice. For now.

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Casual

Splendor in the Grass—Revisited

In college, my friends and I used to debate the year that one was irretrievably, unqualifiedly, with no more excuses middle-aged. The age we finally settled on was 37. And here I am. If my college self could somehow be introduced to my now middle-aged self, what would he think? More than anything, I imagine, he would be startled by how much of my time I spend thinking about grass. No, not the kind you smoke. The kind you water and mow.

When my wife and I bought our house in Washington, the first house we'd ever owned, one of its principal attractions was its lawn. It was the most beautiful lawn I'd ever seen, thick and dewy and verdant. It was the previous owner's pride and joy, and as we concluded the deal, he solemnly enjoined me to take good care of it.

That seemed easy enough. I'd grown up in Canada. In between the time the snow melts and the time the autumn rains start, you need to water a lawn maybe six or eight times—no trouble fitting that into a busy schedule. I had a vague memory of my father moving the sprinkler around the yard on Sundays, and he never seemed over-burdened by the job.

Then I moved to Vietnam-on-the-Potomac. Suddenly I found myself paying $600-a-month summertime electric bills. I bought short pants for the first time since 1981. I bought a straw hat. And I began devoting my life to the upkeep of my lawn.

It didn't take me long to learn that the reason my lawn looked so lovely was that the previous owner had been saturating it with enough chemicals to poison a small town. He had signed a multi-year contract with a local lawn-maintenance company, and once a month they slip a little card under the door itemizing the fertilizers and nutrients, the fungicides, insecticides, and herbicides, the antioxidants, deodorants, and antidepressants they have applied over the past four weeks.

Sometimes they leave behind a little yellow tag on a stick, pushed into the grass, helpfully suggesting we keep the children off it for the next 24 hours. Protecting my children from Love Canal-like toxins has turned out, however, to be the least of my agricultural responsibilities.

The blend of grasses in my lawn, I'm told, is almost exactly the same as that of the famous lawns of Oxford University. But at Oxford, it rains every day and averages 62 degrees in July. We are trying to keep our Oxford lawn alive in a city that lies on the same latitude as Palermo.

So it must be watered all the time. Endlessly. And in certain precise ways. You cannot water a Washington lawn in the daytime: The water evaporates before it sinks below the surface. You wake up at dawn to start the sprinklers, move them at 7:30, and then turn them off when it's time to take the kids to school. You start them again after dinner and move them when the kids go to bed. It's not a task. It's a calling.

Sometimes I contemplate slackening my standards and letting my inherited greensward turn a little brown. Sometimes I calculate the cost of installing built-in sprinklers that can be controlled with a timer. Sometimes I think about replacing the whole thing with a rock garden. Sometimes I wonder whether there isn't more to life than this.

But that's the thing about middle age. You realize: Actually, there isn't more to life than this. The people amongst whom I live, my neighbors, aren't interested in my interior life. They judge me, as they must, by what they can see, and nothing I do is quite as visible as my care of my lawn. We hear a great deal about community nowadays. Well, there's only one thing I do whose consequences fall inescapably upon my community, and that is my care of my property. If I maintain it well, I'm doing my duty by my neighbors. If I fail it, I fail them.

This is of course the sort of thinking that used to lead intellectuals to condemn the emptiness of middle-class life.

I remember reading as a student one of the earliest of those critics, Philip Slater, who published *The Pursuit of Loneliness* in 1970. Slater had many severe things to say about lawns. He had many severe things to say about marriage, raising your kids, and paying your taxes, too. Slater called himself a "social critic." My neighbors would call him a slob. If I lived next door to him, so would I.

I volunteered for the job of taking care of this grass, just as I volunteered for every other responsibility in my life. I'm glad to have them all. You know, on the whole I'm surprisingly happy to be 37.

David Frum

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the weekly Standard

Suicidal Jurisprudence

A five-justice majority of the Supreme Court, in a pair of physician-assisted-suicide cases decided June 26, has declined to proclaim a generalized "right to die" in the Constitution. And the other four justices have joined them in a unanimous vote to uphold broad prohibitions against assisted suicide in the state laws of Washington and New York.

It is apparent from the written opinions these two cases have produced that the justices—each for different reasons—were alarmed by what they were being asked to do here. What would it have meant for the Supreme Court to find, as the Second and Ninth U.S. Circuit Courts of Appeal had found, that the Fourteenth Amendment protects the "right" of mentally competent, terminally ill patients to murder themselves with poison prescribed by their doctors? In law and medical practice, there would have been no way to restrict this new right. "Mentally competent" and "terminally ill" are subjective and elastic designations. And special medical privileges could not have been restricted to the designees. The rest of us, the incompetent or not-yet-terminal, would have gotten our euthanizing hemlock, too.

So we may be momentarily grateful for the Supreme Court's nervousness about all this. But we may be grateful for nothing else. The justices have done incoherent, shabby work on assisted suicide. Their reasoning—if that's the word for it—cannot retard the nation's slow but continuing cultural embrace of death. In important respects, in fact, the court has now welcomed that embrace, and—as the majority opinion has it—urged "this debate to continue." Fine words. Except that "this debate" continues in one direction only: toward the grave.

In the assisted-suicide cases, the justices had an insoluble problem. It can be summed up in a single word: abortion. In its 1992 *Casey* ruling, decided by a 5-4 vote, the court identified the "heart" of American liberty as the ability "to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." No general restriction of the abortion right, the *Casey* majority concluded, was consistent with this alleged principle. But assisted-suicide proponents soon asked a telling question: If the constitutionally protected "mystery" right means a mother may kill her unborn child, how then can the court not conclude that it also means she may kill herself? The court cannot so logically conclude, of course. A rigorous denial of the "right to die" would require the justices at least partially to deny the right to abortion.

Which these justices are not about to do. Only three *Casey* dissenters, Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas, remain on the court. Four members of the *Casey* majority remain, as well: O'Connor, Kennedy, Souter, and Stevens. And President Clinton has appointed two presumably pro-*Casey* jurists, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, to the court. There are now six pro-choice Supremes, in other words. So to fashion even a bare majority against assisted suicide without throwing itself into renewed chaos over abortion, the court must pretend that *Casey* barely exists.

Chief Justice Rehnquist, writing for the majority in *Washington* v. *Glucksberg*, performs this charade. He cites *Casey* and quotes its wildly expansive "mystery" language in a brief and totally inscrutable passage. Yes, he acknowledges, the court has thereby located the abortion right and many other rights of personal autonomy in the Fourteenth Amendment. But that fact "does not warrant the sweeping conclusion that any and all important, intimate, and personal decisions are so protected." And it does not mean that the Fourteenth Amendment protects suicide. Why? Because the Supreme Court says so, that's why. And it now wishes to be left alone about the matter, thank you very much.

This is enough to win the signature of Justice Kennedy, who doesn't bother to explain how it is that Americans enjoy a "right to define one's own concept of existence"—*his* words—but can be prevented by state law from defining themselves to death. Rehnquist's sleight of hand is also enough for Justice O'Connor. She writes a separate concurring opinion of haiku-like opacity. "Death will be different for each of us," begins the first of her four paragraphs. "In sum," begins the last, "there is no need to address the question whether suffering patients have a constitutionally cognizable interest in obtaining relief from the suffering that they may experience in the last days of their

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lives." One would have thought a resolution of that question was precisely the point of the exercise. But Justice O'Connor says no, without much elaboration.

Justice Ginsburg, in a one-sentence concurring opinion, announces that she "substantially" agrees with Justice O'Connor. Justice Breyer is a bit less restrained. He thinks there may well be something "roughly like a 'right to die with dignity,'" a right that might force a very different Supreme Court result under slightly different circumstances in the future. Justice Stevens goes Breyer a few steps further. After extensively quoting his own past dissents—and reprinting John Donne's "no man is an island" meditation of 1624—Stevens reports that he is already satisfied suicide is sometimes "entitled to constitutional protection." And he as much as predicts that a future plaintiff will succeed with that claim before the court.

It is left to David Souter to forecast the arguments by which the Supreme Court might someday reach such an astounding result. Souter writes a gigantic concurring opinion in *Glucksberg*, one designed to advance what he calls a Fourteenth Amendment jurisprudence of utmost care and case-by-case precision. You can't be arbitrary if you have enough law-review articles and footnotes at your disposal, he apparently believes.

Oh, but you can, as Souter's tortured opinion makes clear. Despite the Hippocratic Oath and 700 years of history, he says he will "accept" the contention that deliberately lethal injections are "consistent with standards of medical practice." Despite more than 200 years of American law, he says there is a constitutionally significant liberty interest in suicide. And he says he will reserve the right to declare that interest "fundamental" at some later date. The states must give "reasonable legislative consideration" to a relaxation of their existing laws against "voluntary" murder, Souter insists. And Souter will be watching. "Sometimes," he mutters ominously, "a court may be bound to act regardless of the institutional preferability of the political branches as forums for addressing constitutional claims."

So it's back to the states, all nine justices agree, with one degree of enthusiasm or another. But state law is proving itself virtually helpless against the Heaven's Gate sensibility now spreading like a fungus across the land. The morning the Supreme Court's assisted-suicide decisions were handed down, a central Florida jury acquitted Dr. Ernesto Pinzon-Reyes of first-degree homicide. Pinzon-Reyes had injected a 70-year-old terminal cancer patient, Rosario Gurrieri, with a lethal dose of potassium chloride—in full view of that patient's assembled family, *against their wishes and without Gurrieri's assent*. Later the same day, 40-year-old Janis Murphy of Henderson, Nevada, turned up dead in a Southfield, Michigan, motel room. Ms. Murphy had complained of "chronic fatigue syndrome." But an autopsy found no evidence of disease. Cause of death: carbon-monoxide poisoning. Janis Murphy's "doctor": Jack Kevorkian, who has eluded repeated attempts at criminal prosecution, despite having killed at least 45 people since 1990.

Back to the states, indeed. The Supreme Court, for its own short-term political convenience, has punted on assisted suicide. And in the process, the court has clearly signaled how it might handle exactly the same football the next time around. Three justices—Breyer, Stevens, and Souter—have written formally "concurring" opinions that are for all practical purposes dissents. They're not ready to endorse the right to die. Yet. Three more justices—O'Connor, Ginsburg, and Kennedy—have taken thoroughly inexplicable positions. Even the three stalwarts—Rehnquist, Scalia, and Thomas—have trimmed their sails. This is not a solid fortress, to put it mildly. With another Clinton Supreme Court appointee or two, today's 9-0 assisted-suicide decisions could easily get turned into 5-4 or 6-3 votes the other way.

That would be a horror, to be sure. But things are plenty bad already. And the court has just made them worse.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Scenes from the Handover

by Meredith Berkman

Hong Kong

Less than 12 hours before the formal ceremony at midnight on June 30 during which the Union Jack was lowered in Hong Kong and the Chinese flag was raised, Shanghai Tang had metamorphosed into the old Filene's Basement. The chic Hong Kong boutique—which sells everything from lime-silk Mao jackets to silver chopsticks to Deng Xiaoping watches—was packed with hot-handed foreigners eager to feed their capitalist hunger for merchandise "made by Chinese." Everyone from Time Warner chairman Reginald Brack to big-haired Texan tourists was

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caught up in the excitement, snapping up Chinese-flag baseball caps or quilted purple-silk slippers as fast as the store could be restocked (a new shipment was needed by midday). One woman was literally desperate to find a scarlet-and-orange jacket in her size before sundown. " I have to wear something Chinese!" she cried.

But just across Queens Road, at Marks & Spencer, the British outpost that is a cross between Macy's and J.C. Penney (with a dash of Dean & DeLuca thrown in), the store was virtually empty; an eerie stillness had settled over the aisles. A few British women tried on support bras in the dressing room. A Hong Kong Chinese woman with a toddler in tow inspected the sensible white-cotton T-shirts. They all left empty-handed.

In the days leading up to the Handover, Hong Kong looked and felt like the site of an end-of-millennium Mardi Gras. The skyline, which resembles a high-tech Lego set, was ablaze with festive red, yellow, and green lights that adorned the front of almost every towering skyscraper. Public squares were elaborately decorated with pink flamingos, multicolored silk dragons, and red paper lanterns. Hundreds of taxis were already flying the new red SAR (Special Administrative Region) flags from their radio antennae.

It was impossible to get a table for dim sum at the exclusive China Club even if you were a member. (The club costs $20,000 to join.) And in a city where many residents own fleets of Rolls-Royces and Mercedes, the traffic got so bad that many people were forced out of their chauffeured cars and into the narrow streets.

Hotels were buzzing with the reflected glory of powerful dignitaries and international tycoons. At the Grand Hyatt, hotel staff dropped to their knees to greet the Queen of Thailand. At the hotel's Chinese restaurant, a pair of high-ranking European diplomats seemed to mistake a Chinese insurance-company magnate for a Communist party official.

But there was a distinctly ghoulish quality to the pre-Handover frenzy. Like the thrill-seeking Washingtonians who packed picnic baskets to watch the Civil War's Battle of Manassas in 1861—later racing home in panic when they realized the Union was being routed—Hong Kong's visitors seemed almost oblivious to the harsh political reality lurking just behind the highly choreographed media event, a uniquely scripted piece of history.

Just beneath the surface of all the swirling activity was a pervasive ambivalence. People whose parents fled the mainland Communists to make their fortunes in Hong Kong—which was little more than a barren rock when they arrived—are now faced with living in the reunified "Motherland." Certainly, "Red China," as many working people here still call it, has progressed a very long way from where it used to be. No one really expects Beijing to willingly—as one Cantonese taxi driver put it—"kill the chicken that lays the golden egg."

But despite the dozens of glittery Handover balls, the public concerts and art exhibits and the five-day public holiday, people really weren't rejoicing at all. "I have so many mixed emotions," a woman named Winnie told me as we ran on adjoining treadmills at the gym in our first full day as residents of Hong Kong, China. "What do you tell your kids?" she asked. "I'm Chinese and so I don't want to say the Chinese are bad. But I'm worried."

The night before, Winnie and her husband—bankers who moved back to Hong Kong last December after 14 years in Canada, where they are now citizens—had joined friends for a small party at a Kowloon hotel. When the royal yacht *Britannia* sailed away shortly after midnight with Prince Charles and outgoing Hong Kong governor Chris Patten aboard, Winnie began to cry. Her husband ran outside to wave farewell.

"Things were good under the British," she said. "We had freedom and we could say and do what we wanted. The only bad thing was that it wasn't our country. I think I'll be a little wary to say what I think now—you don't know who someone is or who they're talking to."

Even Winnie believes that Beijing probably has very little interest in her political views. A good sign is that the new government decided not to take action against the 3,000 protesters who staged a democracy march through Hong Kong's central district on July 1. Of course, the cameras were rolling that day, and it's no secret that dissidents will have a tougher time in the future.

Most people—even if they turned out for the massive June 4 democracy demonstration—are less worried about another Tiananmen Square than they are about their quality of life. "I don't trust the Chinese government," said a veteran police officer patrolling quiet Barker Road the other day. "I'm Chinese but my nationality is British. I'm supposed to retire in a couple of years, and I'm scared. I don't believe the government when they say they'll give me my full pension."

Hong Kong is filled with hard-working pragmatists, people willing to adapt to almost anything if it means they have the opportunity to achieve economic prosperity. The possibility of losing that opportunity is perhaps the biggest fear of all.

Meredith Berkman is a freelance writer living in Hong Kong, China.

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Bill Clinton, German Romantic

by James W. Ceaser

On June 14, President Clinton launched his highly touted "conversation" on race at the University of California, San Diego. The initiative was months in the making but, as the president would have it, a lifetime in the preparation. "If there is any issue I ought to have credibility on," he said, "it is this one. It is part of who I am and what I've done."

The president has committed himself to at least one conversation-related "event" per month over the next year. Then, after conferring with members of the special commission he has created, he will issue a report to the nation. This will conclude the formal phase of the conversation, but the president hopes that its impact on the hearts and minds of the citizenry will continue.

Until last month, most Americans would have taken a "conversation" to mean a private verbal exchange between two persons or among individuals in a small group. But those who spend a good deal of time on college campuses knew better: "Conversations" on hot-button issues such as sexual harassment, "diversity," and race relations are commonplace in academia. They are convened by administrators under one of two circumstances: either when these administrators have nothing to say on a subject deemed to be serious and crying out for discussion; or when they in fact have a major change of mind, in which case the "conversation" is used to circumvent traditional forums for deliberation (like faculty senates). Guided from the top, but free from the stigma of appearing to be so, a conversation is a remarkably effective instrument for engineering a desired consensus. The opposition is duly heard, a few cosmetic changes are made to the original proposal (in order to demonstrate the sincerity of the dialogue), and the final plan is announced, with widespread self-congratulation for the "civility" of the process.

It is unsurprising that the notion of this type of conversation should have been introduced into Washington-speak by Sheldon Hackney, Clinton's chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and a former president of the University of Pennsylvania. In 1994, Hackney organized a "national conversation on American pluralism and identity," which supported earnest discussions of these themes in seminars and town meetings across the country. This conversation continued for a couple of years—for all I know, it may be going on still—but it evidently failed to obviate the need for the president's current initiative.

So where did this concept of a national conversation come from, originally? You might think it stemmed from the information "superhighway," of which the White House is so enamored, with its Internet exchanges ("chat groups"), constant telephone contacts, and appeals to reach out and touch someone. But in fact the concept has a much deeper and more deliberate origin. It was introduced by the German thinker Adam Müller (1779-1829), who first called for an all-European "conversation" in 1804 and who later, in his influential *Lectures on Rhetoric*, made the idea of "conversation" a central element of rhetorical theory.

ADAM MULLER FIRST CALLED FOR AN ALL-EUROPEAN "CONVERSATION" IN 1804, A WEAPON IN HIS ATTACK ON RATIONAL CONSTITUTIONALISM.

Müller is known today as one of the most representative of German Romantic thinkers. And he is best understood by what he opposed: rational constitutionalist thought. Constitutionalist thinkers—such as the American founders—made a great effort to distinguish public communication from private communication. They were of course aware of what Alexander Hamilton called "the little arts of popularity"—the devices by which politicians curry favor and win power—but they sought to guard against these tactics and to set a higher standard of deliberative speech (such as that taking place in representative assemblies and among constitutional officers). The separation of public speech from other forms of discourse was meant to add to the dignity of political reasoning and to help complete the transition from medieval times, when a nation was likened to a natural family in which the monarch exercised authority based on the parental model.

Müller's idea of "conversation" was a primary weapon in his attack on rational constitutionalism. Wishing to recreate a new organic entity under an all-embracing state, he aimed to bring back to politics the intimacy that rational forms had taken from it and to break down barriers separating the public from the private. He thus begins where one might expect—with the purely private relations between the sexes. His idea is that, while male and female are different, there is nonetheless a yearning for a deeper unity. "Conversation" is the vehicle that will fuse these seemingly

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opposite forces and realize a full harmony.

From here, Müller goes on to envision "conversations" everywhere—in music, art, philosophy, and politics. Conversations presuppose a community. And once a conversation begins, there is a natural impetus, despite intervening differences, toward unity in the end. Each "voice," while hearing itself, will also "feel in all labyrinths of thoughts and tones an omnipresent harmonic law." As with conversations between lovers, so with political conversations among a whole people. "Two lovers constitute an assembled people," and "a whole interacting nation is able to cultivate this discourse and perfect it."

There is in all this a large serving of pure bombast, of course. Yet where the idea is not merely pretentious, it contains ominous elements of manipulation and social control. Appearing to be unguided, the "process" moves us to some goal or end. Rhetoric as conversation is not a matter of distance, where a speaker in his own name will deliberate with, attempt to persuade, or even try to bully his audience. Rather, we are part of the thing, validating by our own presumed participation the result of the conversation. Writing nearly 200 years ago, just over the bridge to the 19th century, Adam Müller could not have had Bill Clinton in mind. Nevertheless, in making his plea for a national conversation in Germany, he asked that it be initiated by those who "feel this people's pain" (*welche den Gram dieses Volk empfinden*).

In reaction to the Clinton plan, many have expressed disappointment with the message, but few with the initiative itself. Yet the idea of the presidency as a peripatetic mouth, trotted from event to event, is not only distasteful, but antithetical to constitutional purposes. What kind of free people wants—or needs—a single person to perform this function? Presidents do educate, yes, but in the context of performing a presidential duty, so that word and deed are linked. This is what makes presidential speech real, in contrast to surreal "events" such as the San Diego-begun conversation or the Philadelphia summit on volunteerism.

Only at certain moments—on ceremonial occasions, on leaving office—do presidents earn the right to our indulgence of their personal impulses and thoughts. And by restricting themselves to these moments, presidents provide a chance that significant attention will be paid to their words, which otherwise suffer from the loss of value that accompanies all forms of inflation. In not respecting the economics of speech, Adam Müller—practically forgotten today—pronounced his own epitaph, and probably Bill Clinton's as well: "Only what is pure gold will last."

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Whatever Happened to the Business Cycle?

Will There Ever Be Another Recession?

By Irwin M. Stelzer

"America's economy is the strongest in the world," our president gloated as he addressed his guests at the G-7 summit in Denver. He is right, of course. We have had only one minor recession in the past 15 years. The unemployment rate is at its lowest level since 1973: Everyone who wants a job has one, and more and more people are giving up stay-at-home status in favor of participating in the work force. Inflation is somewhere between very low and nil, depending on whether you think the Consumer Price Index is overstated. Consumer confidence is at a 28-year high. Corporate profits continue to rise, driving stock prices to levels 20 percent higher than the day in December 1996 when Federal Reserve Board chairman Alan Greenspan said he feared "irrational exuberance" had pushed stocks to nervous-making levels.

Is this remarkable state of affairs due to the policies of a Democratic president, or those of the Republican Congress? To the non-partisan Federal Reserve Board, or the private sector? Or to some combination of these institutions? The answer is far from trivial, because it goes to the heart of capitalism itself and why it is working so well.

Giving credit where he is certain credit is due, Bill Clinton assigns full responsibility for our prosperity to—Bill Clinton. He says his pursuit of freer trade, his tax and budgetary policies, and his (actually, our) "investment" in education have produced the permanent plateau of prosperity from which America now looks down on the troubles of France (unemployment 12.5 percent and rising), Germany (unemployment 11.4 percent and rising), and Japan (a financial system on the brink of collapse).

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GIVING CREDIT WHERE HE IS CERTAIN CREDIT IS DUE, BILL CLINTON ASSIGNS FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR PROSPERITY TO—BILL CLINTON.

Never mind that the burst of growth in the most recent quarter—an annual rate of 5.9 percent—merely took the growth rate above the 5 percent mark for the first time since the last quarter of the Reagan presidency. Nor that it was the rejection of Clinton's economic stimulus package by the Republicans in Congress that has kept the economy from overheating. Nor that Republican rejection of his proposed massive tax increases prevented the economy from tipping in the other direction, into recession. Nor that the Republicans' successful scuttling of his wife's plan for a government takeover and bureaucratization of the health-care industry was followed by an end to double-digit inflation in health-care costs. Nor that the educational system that has received so much presidential attention is a shambles, with the only good news coming from the school-choice experiments that the president and the teachers' unions so vehemently oppose.

Certainly, the president has reason to brag. In a deviation from form, he has shown constancy in pursuit of freer trade. This has opened overseas markets to American goods and services, driving exports (which now constitute over 11 percent of GDP, up from less than 8 percent 20 years ago) to record levels. It has also made everything from competitively priced T-shirts to well-built cars available to American consumers—a double boon, since the well-priced imports keep pressure on American manufacturers to seek higher profits from increased efficiency rather than higher prices.

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Lucky for the president, and for American manufacturers and consumers, that there have been enough Republicans in Congress to overcome the opposition of most of the president's Democratic colleagues to such prosperity-producing measures as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement.

The Republicans are by no means immune to the temptation to emphasize their contribution to our well-being. No surprise there. After all, both parties have always claimed that they, and not the other guys, are the fount of economic wisdom and have the political courage to take hard decisions—such as the one to balance the budget by cutting federal programs after they have left office!

This quest for star billing for what are, if truth be known, minor actors in the economic play that is now unfolding cannot succeed in the end. The true co-stars, the ones responsible for the long-running hit show we are all enjoying, are not the politicians but the private sector and the economist in the chairman's seat at the Fed.

The private sector made its contribution in spite of the opposition of the political establishment. When the financier Mike Milken burst upon the scene in the late 1970s, America's corporations were overmanned and undermanaged. Corpocrats, beyond the reach of their widely scattered and therefore largely impotent shareholders, concentrated on acquiring corporate jets and other perks, rather than cutting costs and improving their products and services. Some corporate managers, of course, concentrated on increasing shareholder value by keeping costs down and profits up. But many did not, leaving their companies vulnerable to foreign competition and depriving consumers of access to the best technology had to offer.

Along came Milken. He noticed that over 95 percent of American companies with assets in excess of $25 million could not receive an investment-grade rating if they went to the bond market. Milken corrected this situation by developing high-yield bonds, derided by the establishment as "junk." This liberated thousands of firms from reliance on their commercial banks for credit, and gave cash-short but idea-rich entrepreneurs the money they needed to mount hostile bids for inefficient companies. The money they would save from more efficient operation would pay the interest on the debt, and eventually permit the company to move to more conventional financing.

For the first time, the nation's corporate managers felt a twinge of the job insecurity usually reserved for workers on the line—coal miners, auto workers, and the like. As with all entrenched institutions, the business establishment's first reaction was to turn to the government for help. And it got it. The Milken-led restructuring of American industry was opposed by Democratic congressman John Dingell, who mounted accusatory hearings; by headline-hunting Republican prosecutor Rudolph Giuliani, who persisted in publicly arresting people he later (much later) failed to indict; by state legislatures, which responded to corporate whining for relief from the predators' pressure by passing anti-takeover laws.

The fact that these corporate raiders had names like Steinberg, Perelman, Jacobs, and Belzberg only heightened the establishment's indignation at this upset to their clubby lives. As Connie Bruck pointed out in her *Predators' Ball*, one deposed corpocrat called Milken a "pawnbroker"; others saw these takeover battles as "a class war between the corporate America and the Wall Street elite, and the . . . arrivistes" who had trampled on "two pillars of the establishment—the commercial banks and America's corporations."

The intensity of feelings is worth noting because it proves that the Milken-led assault was no minor matter. The safe, soft way of life of America's corporations was threatened, and the managers of these companies knew it. Once a thrusting, hungry group of entrepreneurs was given access to the capital markets, the American economy changed as much as Britain's when it was given access to Margaret Thatcher.

Economics trumped politics. The establishment failed to repel the raiders, and the nation's corporations finally responded by cutting costs and becoming more competitive. The establishment may have succeeded in punishing Milken for the harm he did it, but the discomfort he caused nevertheless had its desired effect. Companies began to pay attention to efficiency, a new concern that helped produce the lean and mean corporate machines that can now compete with any in the world.

Again, no thanks to the politicians, who resisted downsizing with all of the (fortunately, limited) means

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at their disposal. Then-secretary of labor Robert Reich attacked layoffs from the left, contending that companies were dumping workers to increase profits and share prices, thereby breaking what he calls "the implicit social compact that once existed between companies and their employees." Pat Buchanan attacked them from the right, Bob Dole attacked them from a place on the political spectrum that remains difficult to locate, and the president drew on his infinite supply of compassion to ask managers to consider their workers' needs, as if slowing the productivity improvement that is the flip side of downsizing could somehow lead to a better life for Americans.

The private sector must share the stage with Alan Greenspan. To understand the magnitude of the Fed chairman's contribution, one has to recognize the limits of the tools with which he has to work. On the analytical level, Greenspan has had to face the grim fact that economic theory has little to say about cause-and-effect relationships in our complicated $7.6 trillion economy. At one time he might have looked to John Maynard Keynes's *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* for guidance, but Keynes's notion that fine-tuning the economy through government spending and manipulating consumer demand can pull us out of a recession is no longer well regarded in informed circles, to put it mildly. After the Keynesians were routed by Milton Friedman and the monetarists, it seemed as if the Fed's job had become simple: Control the money supply and you control the price level. Alas, when the more pragmatic members of the economics profession pointed out that the monetarists could not even define "money" (does it include only cash, or cash plus bank accounts, and if the latter, savings accounts as well as checking accounts?), much less control its supply, Fed chairmen were left to rely on their wits and their "feel," informed by a reading of the imperfect economic data provided by the government and by private sources.

Greenspan is therefore on his own, left to apply his best judgment to often-revised economic data, much of them out of date by the time he receives them. Indeed, some of the revisions to government-gathered data are so substantial that it is often difficult to tell where we have been, much less where we are going.

When Greenspan does finally sort things out, the tools at his disposal are so few as to make one wonder why the world even cares what he thinks. He cannot control long-term interest rates, which are set in a highly competitive market in which borrowers bid for lenders' capital. This so distressed the Clinton team that James Carville, his populist yearnings for a loose fiscal policy to finance more government spending doomed to go unsatisfied, groaned that he wished to be reincarnated as the bond market.

Greenspan can, however, set short-term rates, a fact that is significant in itself and because it gives him a method of signaling to the waiting world just where he thinks the economy is heading. By raising rates, he flags a concern that inflation may be rearing its unlovely head; by standing pat, he tells investors and others that all is about as well as it can be in this almost best of all possible worlds. Because he is held in high regard by many of the nation's money managers, because he is seen as independent of political pressure (an independence he paradoxically maintains by remaining aware of the political realities), because his demeanor commands respect bordering on awe (this, despite a taste for the celebrity cocktail circuit), Greenspan has made himself a force to be reckoned with. And he has used that power to help keep the economy moving steadily forward.

No thanks to critics on both the left and the right. Liberals such as Northwestern University's Robert Eisner think that Greenspan's tightfistedness dooms the economy to "lower employment and slower growth than their potential." That is a view shared by one of Wall Street's leading Democrats, Felix Rohatyn, as well as several Democratic congressmen, who fret that Greenspan is likely to tighten just when the fruits of prosperity are starting to become available to lower-paid workers. Indeed, the whole notion that monetary policy should be aimed at keeping inflation in check is unacceptable to most Democrats. In his novel-cum-memoir, Robert Reich disapprovingly reports that "Wall Street bankers and Federal Reserve members . . . want more than anything in the world to eliminate inflation. This is what the rich (who lend their money and bear the risk of inflation) have always wanted."

The Right, most notably Steve Forbes and gold-standard-bearer Jack Kemp, also goes in for Greenspan-bashing. They complain that the Fed is keeping the economy from growing at an annual rate of more than the 2.5 percent Greenspan allegedly considers to be the maximum non-inflationary rate. Forbes and Kemp have the support of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page, which delights in excoriating what it calls "the fear-of-growth crowd," and Republican congressmen who fear inflation less than they do facing constituents who may find the value of their shares reduced by some Washington central banker whom they think their elected representatives should be able to control.

Greenspan has withstood these challenges and

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done what he can to keep the economy on a non-inflationary growth path. But a central banker's role can only be that of a moderator of underlying economic forces: Were he capable of creating prosperity, rather than merely prolonging it for some limited time, we would never have another recession.

Never have another recession. Suddenly, an amazing idea is in the air—the idea that the business cycle has at last been interred by a newly flexible economy. *Fortune* magazine put it this way: "The U.S. economy is stronger than it's ever been before . . . reflect[ing] fundamental improvements . . . that . . . ensure that future fluctuations will be less extreme and less harmful than those of the past." *BusinessWeek* headlined a recent cover story "How Long Can This Last? Strong growth with little unemployment and low inflation doesn't have to peter out." *U.S. News* asks: "Are Recessions Necessary?" It answers: "The restructured economy may be less vulnerable to the business cycle."

Although no one is quite willing to say we will never have another recession, the mainstream media are clearly saying that it definitely won't happen soon, hinting that it may never happen again, and adding that if it does, it will be mild by historical standards. And all this just a few short years after the *New York Times* examined post-downsizing America and announced "that people were bitter, anxious, disenfranchised"! That remark appeared in the *Times* just a few years after Paul Kennedy, in his much-heralded *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, warned of "the erosion of . . . U.S. manufacturing supremacy," "the uncompetitiveness of U.S. industrial products abroad," and "the massive long-term decline in blue-collar . . . employment." Kennedy called for policymakers to manage our affairs so that the relative erosion of our position could take "place slowly and smoothly." Now it seems that instead of declinists telling us we are heading for steady impoverishment, we have triumphalists asserting with equal fervor that we have reached recession-free nirvana.

That optimistic scenario rests on three related changes in the economy: globalization, deregulation, and technology- and investment-driven increases in productivity. Because of these changes, the Clinton team and others boast of "a new economic paradigm," to borrow a phrase from the documents distributed at the G-7 summit.

Start with globalization. There is little question that rapid reductions in transport and communications costs, freer trade, the partial prying open of Japan's markets, and the increased internationalization of even medium-sized American businesses have reduced the danger of inflation. No longer is it the case that domestic producers can raise prices or reduce quality with impunity when they have reached the limits of productive capacity. To do so is to invite a flood of imports, as the Big 3 auto companies found to their dismay. The world is truly the American consumer's oyster. And the American manufacturer's as well. No longer need our managers respond immediately to worker demands for higher wages when the unemployment rate reaches rock bottom. Instead, they can call on Indonesian and Central American workers to manufacture sneakers, and the Asian and Mexican labor pools for apparel. Or rely on immigrants (legal and illegal) to supplement the supply of domestic labor.

CAPITALISM WITHOUT LIMITS

THE WORLD TRULY IS THE AMERICAN CONSUMER'S OYSTER—AND THE AMERICAN MANUFACTURER'S AS WELL.

In short, it is nonsense, say these new paradigmists, to continue to believe that inflation threatens when the no-longer insular American economy reaches the limits of its productive capacity. It is therefore unnecessary to take demand-dampening, economy-cooling measures merely because American industry is producing at 85 percent of capacity (thought by traditionalists to be the upper limit of which it is capable), or because there are no longer the "few hungry men at the gates" whom Henry Ford is alleged to have found so useful when dealing with the wage demands of his workers.

The second ingredient of this new paradigm is deregulation. Lawrence Lindsey, a former governor of the Federal Reserve who now makes his home at the American Enterprise Institute, says "the real reason for our robust performance" is the ongoing deregulation movement, using that term in its broadest sense, initiated by President Carter and carried forward by Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton (the last two by lowering trade barriers). "Industries protected by regulators, by tariffs, by oligopoly, by conditions in their markets, or by other means, had considerable discretion in setting prices," Lindsey writes.

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"The opening of these industries terminated that pricing power—including pricing power in labor markets—and that is the secret behind the American success story." The oil, gas, transportation, telecoms, and (soon) electric industries now must compete for business. The steel, textile, and auto industries are no longer fully protected by tariffs and "voluntary" quotas. Banking is being deregulated by a process of administrative fiat. And, notes Lindsey, "it is finally the [politically powerful] farmers' turn. That shows how far our deregulation has gone."

This means that firms are now free to innovate and price as they see fit and that capital and labor flow to their highest and best uses. One example: The deregulated transport industries in 1990 claimed 7.6 percent of our gross domestic product to move goods around the country, according to a study by Primark Decision Economics, a consulting firm headed by Allen Sinai. By 1996 the figure had fallen to 6 percent. That annual saving of 1.6 percentage points comes to $12 billion. Add in lower telephone costs, fuel prices that have declined precipitously since they were deregulated, and cheaper products available from abroad in our freer trading environment, and you get an economy capable of operating at far lower cost, one that is less likely to hit bottlenecks early in an expansion. Indeed, if the process of replacing regulation and monopoly with competition continues, not only in the electric industry but in the provision of government services such as education and postal services, the savings will help fuel further inflation-free growth.

Which brings us to the final ingredient of this new paradigm: rising productivity produced by technological advance and capital investment. Even if wages begin to rise noticeably in response to the pressure of increased demand for workers, inflation need not follow. Massive investment in new plant and equipment in recent years has raised the productivity of our work force; even the investment in computers, which for a long time seemed not to have paid off in America's offices, is now bearing fruit. We have learned from the Japanese the art of just-in-time inventory management, reducing the economy's vulnerability to involuntary inventory accumulation and subsequent sharp reductions in orders. We have learned how to improve our information systems so that manufacturers can adjust supplies and prices more quickly to market conditions, thereby avoiding more massive, delayed adjustments.

Alas, although all of this is true, it does not mean that the economy is now traveling a one-way street to permanent prosperity. For three reasons. First, a major policy error can derail the train to perpetual prosperity. Suppose that an obliging Congress had enacted Clinton's stimulus package, at a time when the economy was growing rapidly, which it turned out it was? Surely the Fed would have reacted to this fiscal madness with a major rise in interest rates and a sharp tightening of the money supply. Since it is difficult to determine precisely how much monetary tightening is needed to offset a given loosening of fiscal policy, the Fed might well have erred in the direction of caution and produced at least a non-trivial recession.

Second, there is the small matter of human weakness. Lindsey noted in a recent talk, "At the present time, the United States is almost the only country that can point with pride to its economic performance." But, he quickly and sensibly adds, "It is the height of hubris to believe that we have found the magic solution to economic problems. There is simply not enough history to allow us to decide that we won't have another recession."

Lindsey worries that the longer the expansion lasts, the dimmer the memory of recession becomes. Investors begin to bid share prices up to levels that don't reflect the risk of their equity investments, and foreign bond prices to levels that fail to include proper acknowledgement of the risk involved. A more-than-modest downturn inevitably follows, with adverse effects on consumer confidence and spending, and eventually on economic growth.

This is more than a theoretical concern. The current level of stock prices depends on investors' expectations that corporate profits will continue to grow, perhaps even at a rate that continues to exceed the growth rate of the overall economy. But profits have increased so rapidly in the past five years partly because wages have not. Indeed, profits now claim a share of national income three percentage points larger than they did in 1992.

Lindsey reasons that wages can't be squeezed much more, especially with unemployment a mere 4.8 percent. So it will be difficult for the growth in profits to continue to exceed the rate at which the overall economy is growing.

If investors have bid up share prices in the expectation that profits can continue to grow at anything like the rate of recent years, they are in for a shock—a drop in share prices of as much as 20 percent, which comes to almost 1,500 points on the Dow. Call it a downturn or call it a correction; whichever term you use, it would result in consumers who feel poorer and businessmen who pay more to borrow money and raise equity capital.

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The third reason that this, or any other, prosperity might come to an end relates to forces beyond the control of the masters of our monetary and fiscal policies, beyond the control of consumers, and beyond the control of the private sector. Asked to identify the biggest challenge governments face, then-British prime minister Harold Macmillan famously responded, "Events, dear boy, events."

We already have experience with one such event—an oil-supply interruption and subsequent price run-up. When the Arabs chose to unsheath their oil weapon in the 1970s, they ushered in a period of stagflation from which it took the Western economies years to extricate themselves. And we already face the risk of another such happening—a trade war or, more likely, creeping protectionism.

Clinton is right to claim that our current prosperity is due in part to increasingly freer trade. But free trade is now at risk from a coalition of trade unions that fear competition with lower-paid overseas workers, and those who want to use the withholding of most-favored-nation status to discipline regimes that violate human rights or countries that don't meet certain environmental and labor standards.

A strong effort by the president, whose one constancy has been his support for free trade, last week beat off the efforts of just such a coalition to deny continued MFN status to China (to the consternation of this publication's editors). But with America's trade deficits with both China and Japan soaring, an election year coming, and the unions prepared to spend millions to support politicians who vote with them, the protectionists' voice may again be heard in the land.

That's the bad news. And it comes as no surprise to Americans that the triumphalists have got it wrong. In response to a recent *Wall Street Journal* poll, three out of four people said they still expect there to be periods of recession. They may remember that a 1969 conference titled "Is the Business Cycle Obsolete?" was followed shortly by a recession.

The good news is that although we are not recession-proof, remaining subject to policy errors, hubris, and Macmillan's "events," we have achieved a major improvement in the trade-off between inflation and economic growth. For all the reasons cited above, it now seems that the economy can grow more rapidly, and sustain lower rates of unemployment, without triggering inflation, than was possible before Milken, downsizing, globalization, and deregulation. No small achievement. ♦

The Cosmic Capitalists

By David Brooks

Massive forces are fundamentally reshaping American society, turbocharging the transition from an industrial to an information-age economy, radically altering the way we do business, and compelling large numbers of American executives to go to work each day in cowboy boots and blue jeans.

These are the Cosmic Capitalists. They know, more than they know anything else, that we are living in an age of unprecedented change. They know that in times of revolution, you've got to confront change. Embrace change. Get up on your toes and floss the teeth of change. Above all, you've got to use short sentences.

The Cosmic Capitalist understands that reality is being altered by INELUCTABLE HISTORICAL FORCES OF UNPRECEDENTED MAGNITUDE. There's Moore's Law, which describes the rapid doubling of performance of the microprocessor. There's Metcalfe's Law, which says the value of a computer network is equal to the square of the number of nodes. And there's the Law of Gatesian Cultural Hegemony, which says that every cockamamie notion that bubbles up amongst the digitheads of Silicon Valley quickly spreads and infects the psyche of all of corporate America.

Hence, the culture of casual dress, gee-whiz futurology, and acne-era speech patterns is tie-dyeing the world of the white collar. Chrysler is running TV commercials that portray its design teams as a bunch of technoweenies in a garage. Alcoa is tearing down the walls in its corporate offices to give the executive suite

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the open-air flexibility of a start-up software company. And suddenly there are squads of Cosmic Capitalists across the business landscape, all of them co-religionists in the faith of Technomarxism: They share the belief that technology ineluctably drives history and that we live at the dawn of a new and unprecedented age.

The cover story in the July issue of *Wired* embodies Technomarxism with almost psychotic perfection. "Two metatrends—fundamental technological change and a new ethos of openness—will transform our world into the beginnings of a global civilization, a new civilization of civilizations, that will blossom through the coming century," write Peter Schwartz and Peter Leyden. Their piece, "The Long Boom," reverberates with the tones and phrases of Cosmic Capitalism: "relentless process . . . unprecedented alignment . . . powerful forces . . . unassailable trends . . . inextricably linked . . . phenomenal growth . . . five waves of technology . . . unprecedented global integration . . . completely new types of work. . . ." The authors celebrate the transformative powers of telecom technology, genetic technology, nanotechnology, and microtechnology and predict a break with all recorded history in the form of an endless boom economy.

Gary Hamel's cover story in the June 23 *Fortune* echoes the breathless wonder: "We live in a discontinuous world—one where digitalization, deregulation, and globalization are profoundly reshaping the industrial landscape. What we see is a dramatic proliferation of new economic life forms: virtual organizations, global consortia, net based commerce, ad infinitum. . . . We have reached the end of incrementalism in the quest to create new wealth. . . . There is an inflection point where the quest for divergence is transformed into a quest for convergence, and a new collective viewpoint emerges."

Most puny non-cosmic mortals cannot even fathom the awesome, universe-shattering magnitude of the changes we are seeing today. "We are at that very point in time when a 400-year-old age is dying and another is struggling to be born," announces Dee Ward Hock, a 67-year-old management guru. For most Technomarxists, Hock's timeline is far too short. They think the breakup of the Bell system is the most significant event since the invention of the printing press half a millennium ago, the microprocessor is the most important advance since Arabic symbolic mathematics two millennia ago, and the mouse is the greatest invention since the mouse.

You've got to think absolutely, positively, supremely big. You don't want to make five-year plans. You want to make thousand-year plans. You don't just want to think about business. You want to envision a totally new world.

After all, we live in an age of transition from a power society to a knowledge society, from a hierarchical society to a networked society, from a skim-milk society to a 2-percent-fat-milk society, and in this new age everyone has to make lots of predictions. In their *Wired* article, like a Nostradamus on Prozac, Schwartz and Leyden envision a glorious future. The Net, according to them, will be the main medium of the 21st century. By about 2002, Europe will have integrated into one nation. Around 2005, 20 percent of Americans will teleshop for groceries, videophones will catch on, labor shortages will hit Germany. Around 2012, gene therapy for cancer will be perfected. By 2018, micromachines will do cell repair. By 2019, Americans will have made a multicultural society, and the global civilization of civilizations will already be three years old. By 2020, cars will run on hydrogen. By about 2000—just 30 months away!—a spirit of generosity will have returned to the American soul.

CAPITALISM WITHOUT LIMITS

MOST PUNY, NON-COSMIC MORTALS CANNOT FATHOM THE AWESOME MAGNITUDE OF THE CHANGES WE ARE SEEING TODAY.

Cosmic Capitalists aren't making bets on the future; they are oracles. They know history, and they know individuals don't make history. Technology makes history, and those who understand technology understand the forces creating the New Man. That's why the big magazines can't go three issues without a story taking us inside the cerebral cortex of Bill Gates. His book is called *The Road Ahead*. What else do you need? Apparently we need more, because side by side with Gates's book are shelves and shelves of similar volumes with titles like *What Comes Next* and *What Comes After What Comes Next*.

Today's Cosmic Capitalist shares the same perspective as the French revolutionaries of 1789, the art-world revolutionaries of 1913, the Russian revolutionaries of 1917, the hippie revolutionaries of 1968, and

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(to some extent) the Newtoid revolutionaries of 1994. The past is irrelevant. The future starts now. Material forces push us forward. Human nature is repealed. Religion is irrelevant. The wise are clued in to the emerging forces. We are seeing the birth of a New Man. And we—lucky we—are here for the start of it all. The excitement is matched only by the delicious ecstasy of self-aggrandizement. All history revolves around us!

If you're not hip to the cutting edge, it's off to the ash heap of history. As John Koa, formerly of Harvard Business School and now of Stanford, exhorts his students and clients, "You must ruthlessly trash outmoded obstructions to creativity: standard operating procedures, protocols, norms of behavior, a confining brand image, the revered memory of old successes."

Cosmic Capitalists live for new ideas, new thinking, new ways of thinking. Even the rules of speech have got to go. You've got to eliminate any hint of a prose style and instead talk like a 15-year-old joystick junkie. Next year's cost projections? They're insanely great. How'd the IPO go? It was really cool. The San Jose conference? Flipped my nuts. Serious mind rub. Real-time life experience.

As the fellows at *Wired* say: "Open, good. Closed, bad. Tattoo it on your forehead." And boy, are the Cosmic Capitalists open. Relentlessly avant-garde, the Cosmic Capitalist tries to manage his company so that it will resemble the inside of a popcorn popper. Hierarchies are officially flattened (while salary structures are quietly steepened). Companies like Dreamworks throw out job titles because titles are confining, old wave (just don't take Jeffrey Katzenberg's parking space). At Inhale Therapeutic Services, CEO Robert Chess got rid of executive offices; now everybody sits in large cubicles called "bullpens." At Oticon, a Danish hearing-aide manufacturer, there are no permanent offices. The desks are on wheels, and employees roll themselves around and bunch up according to the task of the moment. Oticon is nearly paperless; snail mail is received in the "paper room," and if you want to take the document back to your desk you're supposed to scan it into the computer and shred the original (the shards descend in a clear tube through the work area and into the bin below).

At Procter & Gamble, elevators (which are thought to destroy conversations) are out, while escalators (which are thought to enhance them) are in. Corridors are wide, with couches at odd intervals to encourage schmoozing. IDEO, a design company, has long rolls of butcher paper spread out over conference tables for brainstorming and doodling. Kodak has "humor rooms" with games, toys, and Monty Python videos.

Every issue, *Fast Company*, the bimonthly that is the *Pravda* of the new movement, runs a "jobtitlesofthefuture" column, which is so outside-the-box the editors can't even bring themselves to put spaces between the words. Tom Grueskin is chief imagination officer at Gateway 2000. Courtney Dickinson is a culture team leader at Sapient, a systems integration company. Keami Lewis is manager of culture development at Rosenbluth Travel. Marian Salzman is director of the Department of the Future of TBWA Chiat/Day in Amsterdam. Bob Heckman is chief growth officer at the Thomas Group, a consulting firm.

You thought your kid was just wasting time at that alternative high school where smoking cigarettes was a form of gym class, but in reality he was preparing to serve as a consultant to a Cosmic Capitalist with a $600-million-a-year revenue stream. In addition, the fiftyish cutting-edge robber baron wants to accumulate a slouching entourage of 23-year-old, nose-pierced, head-shaved, fingernail-painted, tattooed grungeoids to prove he's got the next generation's most creative minds at his beck and call.

It would be unheard of to go into a Cosmic Capitalist office and find a bunch of people in blue suits, white shirts, and red ties. Instead, to prove they are freethinking bohemians, Cosmic Capitalists tend to wear the Microsoft uniform: Timberlands, khakis, faded blue-flannel shirts. Others, Hollywood influenced, go in for collarless linen shirts or the $2,000-suit-with-a-black-T-shirt look. If they're fat, they favor loud sweaters. Those with strong cheekbones can sport the really tiny European eyeglasses that give you about as much peripheral vision as an astigmatic worm.

To show that he is not an uptight organization man, the Cosmic Capitalist needs a wacky accouterment. The accouterment of choice for Dreamworks's Katzenberg (and many others) is the Supersoaker water cannon. It has boyish charm, and it's a subtle reminder of power, since a company pooh-bah can soak an underling, but an underling would never

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retaliate. Netscape's Webmaster, Robert Andrews, uses a nerf gun. Cosmic Capitalists who play in a middle-aged rock band with a name like "The Prostate Pretenders" are beyond number. All Cosmic Capitalists practice Playfulness With a Purpose, the preferred personality style for ambitious creatives.

To decorate their own spaces, Cosmic Capitalists must have a kitsch collection, even a small one. Some people collect yo-yos. Richard Saul Wurman, an entrepreneur who stages conferences where Cosmic Capitalists pay big bucks to mind-meld, collects ashtrays. Further down the corporate scale, employees decorate their cubicles with the gewgaws of a life far more exciting than the one they actually live. A skiboard may hang from the ceiling, next to an ominously broken piece of bungee cord. The remnants of a boyhood lust for comic books may be taped to the side of a terminal. Women's cubicles feature Curious George books.

All this proves that the Cosmic Capitalist isn't just a businessman. He is an artist. "Ever since the day you first wrapped your fingers around a crayon," the new Apple Computer ads begin, "you were driven by the need to create." Businessmen used to like to describe themselves as warriors; now artists are the role models of choice. Silicon Valley is Paris in the Twenties, except that the creative product for Hemingway and Fitzgerald was expat novels, whereas now it's video compression systems and the eye candy for computer games with titles like "Serial Killer" and "Flesh Eater."

Back in 1964, Marshall McLuhan heralded the Cosmic Capitalist age when he wrote in *Understanding Media*, "The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be . . . to bypass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness." And lo, it has come to pass. The Cosmic Capitalist wanders the halls of his silicon sweatshop preaching the gospel of the new age. Linear thinking is dead, and the new era beckons when executives unshackle themselves from the mindsets and habits of the past and soar into a realm of unfettered imagination.

It used to be that this modernist ethos—this desire to be free of history, to leap out into a brave new future—flourished only in politics (where it created the disastrous Marxist utopias) or in architecture (where it created the disastrous urban schemes of Le Corbusier) or in literature and the arts (where it led to a burst of creativity and then decades of exhaustion). But just when you thought the modernist impulse was so old and outmoded that it would die of senescence, it hits the high-tech valleys where the silicon gurus march, blithely unaware of the generations that have trod this path before them. The Cosmic Capitalists have seen the future. God help us all. ♦

The Meritocracy Dodge

Defenders of Affirmative Action Go On the Attack

By Christopher Caldwell

It has been a time of doomsaying for supporters of affirmative action. In May, the University of California's Boalt Hall Law School revealed that its black enrollment had fallen 81 percent last year, following a 1995 decision of the state university system's board of regents not to take race into account for college admissions. The University of Texas Law School showed a similar drop after abiding by the 1996 *Hopwood* decision, which found Texas's system of racial preferences unconstitutional. Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* bemoaned a world in which UT profs would be "teaching *Brown* v. *Board of Education* with no blacks in the classroom." And President Clinton, in his June race-relations speech at the University of California, San Diego, warned that "minority enrollments in law school and other graduate programs are plummeting for the first time in decades."

What are they complaining about? Affirmative

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action has taken a few hits, but that's it for now. Outside of elite schools in Texas and California, minority enrollment isn't "plummeting": Its rate of increase has merely slowed. And affirmative action faces no threat, large or small, from any legislature anywhere—even in states where Republicans control both houses and the governor's mansion. At the federal level, Newt Gingrich has endorsed the Hatch-Canady bill to end affirmative action, but he does not intend to act on it until next year at the earliest. At present, says Gingrich, "We need 80 percent of our effort on proving we have found a better way to solve the problem and 20 percent of our effort on ending affirmative action."

THE ANTI-LEGACY ARGUMENT HAS SUCCEEDED IN SENDING AFFIRMATIVE-ACTION FOES INTO A DEFENSIVE SCRAMBLE.

This is an indication that Republicans are not only losing the momentum on affirmative action, they're losing the argument, too—and in an extraordinary way. In a deft bit of political jujitsu, affirmative action is being defended most vigorously in the name of a principle that has always been used to attack it: meritocracy.

If affirmative action is wrong because it isn't meritocratic, the defenders of the status quo say, then let's get rid of some of *your* preferences and see how you like it! Friends of affirmative action are getting a lot of mileage out of three particular meritocratic arguments: attacks on alumni preferences at colleges, attacks on athletic scholarships, and calls for "class-based" affirmative action. President Clinton tried to bring them all together in his San Diego speech: "There are those who argue that scores on standardized tests should be the sole measure of qualification for admissions to colleges and universities," he said. "But many would not apply the same standard to the children of alumni or those with athletic ability."

The attack on alumni admissions was first broached by the *Washington Monthly* magazine in the early 1990s and had its fullest exposition in Michael Lind's 1995 manifesto *The Next American Nation*. Lind, who himself opposes affirmative action, posits the existence of a "white overclass" and argues: "Members of the white overclass in the United States tend to avoid criticism of racial preference in higher education, and with good reason: their own sons and daughters often benefit from an even more extensive program of favoritism based on ancestry. . . . The best-kept secret in the United States is this: *legacy preference in college admissions is by far the biggest affirmative action program.*" Lind notes that a fifth of Harvard's students are "legacies"—the children or grandchildren of alumni—and according to a study of one Ivy League campus, freshman legacies had an average SAT score of 1,280, compared with 1,350 for all freshmen.

This may all be true, but it is also true that the degree of unfairness in alumni admissions is dwarfed by the degree of unfairness in race-based affirmative action. Contrast the 70-point Ivy League SAT difference Lind cites with the differential between black and white scores at any major university. The median difference is 180 points, and some universities have gone far higher, including a 288-point gap at Berkeley before 1995. At Rice University, the SAT gap between blacks and Asians reaches 341 points. Thus, to call legacy preference in college "by far the biggest affirmative action program" is rather like calling parking violations "by far our largest crime problem"—there may be more illegal parkers, but they are far less damaging to the polity than most criminals.

Besides which, alumni preferences are voluntary. When universities undertake them (in hopes of corralling contributions, of course), they are knowingly paying a price in the caliber of their student body. This is not true of affirmative action; it is not voluntary, especially under the terms of the 1991 Civil Rights Act, which allows plaintiffs to find discrimination based on numerical representation.

Even so, the anti-legacy argument has proved a successful one, in part because everyone who isn't a legacy remembers how unfair it felt to hear that other kids had an advantage over him in college admissions due to their parentage. And this, in turn, explains why affirmative-action proponents love the argument so much: They accept the argument that, in essence, their skin color gives white children an inherent and unfair advantage over black children and that the only remedy for that is to force the scales of justice more in the direction of blacks.

The anti-legacy argument has sent affirmative-action foes into a defensive scramble. Ward Connerly, point man for California's anti-affirmative-action Proposition 209, is a case in point. "I oppose alumni preferences, I oppose preferences based on somebody who makes a big contribution, based on who's the son of an ambassador," Connerly says. If an elimination of alumni preferences were the next step in the battle against affirmative action, Connerly says, "I would

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strongly support that. Those are preferences that have nothing to do with merit."

Indeed, Connerly is so committed to the principle of meritocracy that he is glad to apply it to schools' athletic programs: "Merit is not just how well you've done on an exam," Connerly says. "You can give preference to athletes and still be consistent with meritocracy. Athletes can merit admission if your objective is to build a great football team. The modern college is no longer just a scholarly environment."

The idea that merit, broadly construed, should trump all other considerations is not limited to Connerly. The closest thing thus far to Gingrich's unattained (and perhaps meant-to-be-unattainable) "alternative" to affirmative action is "class-based affirmative action," or, as Bob Dole advocated it in the closing days of his campaign last year, "needs-based preferences." This fits into the growing, litigation-inspired assumption that the trials of life should be evenly distributed among citizens, and that the public square should be as "fair" as a standardized test. You can't have a real meritocracy, the theory goes, unless everyone has exactly the same opportunities.

The starting point for this argument was Lyndon Johnson's 1965 speech at Howard University, in which he drew a metaphor for remedying racial discrimination. Johnson said, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains, and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race, and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair." The speech is correctly seen as the founding document of affirmative action, and it's an argument that can be adapted to justify affirmative action based on *anything*. It was carried to its logical conclusion in Richard Kahlenberg's 1996 book *The Remedy: Class, Race and Affirmative Action*, in which the author makes the case for an affirmative-action program based on "class" (although Kahlenberg uses the word not to describe class in any traditional sense but as a synonym for "wealth"). Affirmative action, Kahlenberg writes, "should not be discarded but should be revamped so that preferences in education, in employment, and in government contracting are provided on the basis of class, not race or gender. . . . Because of our nation's history of discrimination, minorities are disproportionately disadvantaged and would disproportionately benefit from such redirected efforts."

Kahlenberg is a liberal, but many conservatives have taken to the idea like ducks to water. In the last days of June, Gingrich explained his "nuanced" affirmative-action policy on *Evans & Novak*. He's against bad affirmative action, but for good affirmative action, with class preferences falling under the latter heading. "I believe that quotas and set-asides are wrong and should be repealed," Gingrich said. "I also believe that poor children of any ethnic background in any neighborhood in America deserve a helping hand, to have a really honest, fair chance to pursue happiness, as we promised them in the Declaration of Independence."

Connerly himself told the *Atlanta Journal & Constitution* that he seeks class-based affirmative action. "The problem is not black and white," Connerly says. "It's the haves and have-nots." Such a program, as envisioned by Kahlenberg, would wind up bringing an "acceptable" number of blacks into institutions *without* looking at race, which is only another way of saying it would replace explicit with implicit racism. What's more, the program is on its face scarcely distinguishable from socialism. (In fact, in America, it may be the only practicable form of socialism, if we accept Robert Skidelsky's assertion that regulation is "perhaps the characteristic form of collectivism in the United States.")

It seems that every conservative attempt to dismantle affirmative action results in an equal and opposite statist reaction—from Republicans. A particularly risible example came in Texas in June, when Gov. George W. Bush promised to sign a bill sponsored by two black legislators, angry at declining black enrollment at UT Law School, that would eliminate public-school athletic scholarships. The logic—such as it is—seemed to be that if Texas won't discriminate in favor of blacks in areas where they lag, it shouldn't be allowed to be meritocratic in areas where blacks excel.

There's no doubt that affirmative action undermines meritocracy. But that has always been a secondary objection, a distraction from the central issue: that affirmative action denies freedom of association, and that it counts by race in the first place. As Terry Eastland, author of *Ending Affirmative Action*, puts it, "We didn't fight a Civil War over alumni preference." But liberals have made a great political discovery, if hardly a great logical one: As long as the meritocratic chimera is mistaken for the heart of the matter, making do with affirmative action is going to look more attractive than doing without it. ♦

> RACE, NOT MERITOCRACY, IS THE CENTRAL ISSUE. AS TERRY EASTLAND PUTS IT, "WE DIDN'T FIGHT A CIVIL WAR OVER ALUMNI PREFERENCE."

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James Stewart's America

Hollywood's Most Beloved Icon Was No Everyman

By John Podhoretz

It is a truth, though one not universally acknowledged, that when people die, their eulogists praise them for qualities they did not possess and ignore those qualities they did have. Thus, a man known for a cruel and biting wit will be posthumously transformed into a paragon of kindness; a formidable and distant woman becomes, in death, the unconditionally loving mother her children always wished she had been.

The same thing is happening in the wake of James Stewart's death last week at the age of 89. He is being lionized because for representing America at its best, sunniest, and most optimistic—"the American Everyman," more than one commentator has said. Stewart was by all accounts a decent, pleasant, and remarkably modest fellow in private life. But the notion that, as an actor, James Stewart was the embodiment of the American Everyman gets it almost entirely wrong.

Stewart's particular skill was for playing exceptional men—men so quick-witted that their minds outraced their tongues, causing the trademark stammer that made Stewart sound as though he had never memorized a line and was simply speaking words that were coming into his head for the first time.

He was the only golden-age icon who could convincingly play characters at once intelligent, thoughtful, flawed, and angry—men who were disappointed, not satisfied, with the life they were leading. His ability to capture these qualities helps explain not only why he delivered so many great or near-great performances, but also why he was in so many great or near-great movies.

Stewart's track record from 1938 to 1965 was unparalleled : He made more good films than anybody else in Hollywood. *You Can't Take It With You*, *Destry Rides Again*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Call Northside 777*, *Broken Arrow*, *Rear Window*, and *Anatomy of a Murder* are all glorious pieces of work. Other Stewart films—*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Harvey*, *Winchester '73*, *Vertigo*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*—have their passionate admirers. And he was wonderful in several films most people would agree are otherwise disposable: *The Glenn Miller Story*, *The Stratton Story*, and *Shenandoah*.

In *The Philadelphia Story*, Stewart plays Macaulay Connor, a promising young writer of fiction working undercover for a mass-market magazine to get dirt on Katharine Hepburn's exclusive wedding. Through much of the movie, Stewart drips with contempt—for the Main Line upper class he is spying on, for Hepburn's playboy ex-husband, for the Quaker gentility of a local librarian (having been addressed as "thee," Stewart later asks, "Dost thou have a phone?").

The Philadelphia Story is actually a portrait of two characters who change over the course of the wedding weekend—most obviously Hepburn's Tracy Lord, who goes from being a "wrathful goddess" to an "ordinary human being," but no less importantly Stewart's Macaulay Connor. At a party the night before Hepburn's wedding, the acerbic Connor turns reckless, almost desperately giddy, when he realizes he loves her. "You're the golden girl, Tracy," he tells Hepburn, turning his literary eloquence on her and winning her love as well, if only for one night. Liberated from his own intellectual snobbery, Connor turns some of his contempt on himself for having prostituted his talent to *Spy* magazine and gleefully betrays his employer and his paycheck for new-found principle.

Connor ought to have been an impossible character to play—he is simultaneously the audience's representative, a witty and lively fellow, *and* an obnoxious jerk who needs to be taken down more than a few pegs. Stewart is nothing short of amazing in *The Philadelphia Story*, and he won an Oscar for it. It is part of Hollywood lore that the award was a consolation prize for Stewart's loss the year before when his performance in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* was passed over. But even though Stewart does yeoman work in *Mr. Smith*, the part itself is so meretricious—a ridiculously naive Wisconsin scoutmaster who becomes a crusading U.S. senator after the worshipful teenage son of a political boss suggests he be appointed—that even Stewart cannot save it. Mr. Smith is the role that gave rise to the "Jimmy Stewart as Everyman" myth, but even Jefferson Smith proves to be exceptional—though for no good reason except that the plot demands it. Disgusted by Senate corruption, he shuts the place down

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AP Wide World

with a filibuster and delivers a speech about idealism so eloquent that it leads his chief tormentor to exit the chamber and immediately commit suicide. Mr. Smith is a populist superman; Macaulay Connor is a real, rounded, unforgettable man. And a virile man as well, a man who knows how to attract women and how to be attractive himself.

Stewart is the central figure in two of the sexiest movies ever made—movies that are sexy because the characters he plays find themselves torn between an alluring object of desire and their own wanderlust. In *Rear Window*, Stewart is a hotshot photojournalist with a broken leg trapped in a hot New York apartment where he cannot so easily get away from the impossibly beautiful socialite Grace Kelly. Like Macaulay Connor, he is a snob, a man so proud of his rugged individualism that he cannot hide his contempt for Kelly's *Vogue*-magazine existence. He does everything he can to push her away—he calls her spoiled, makes fun of her tastes, and makes it clear he will never marry her. This, of course, only makes her more determined to snare him. He wants to resist her, but he can't, at least not sexually.

Stewart's character in *Rear Window* is, again, far from admirable, and though he had been a star for almost 20 years when he played the part, he assumed it without vanity. Unlike lesser performers, he never looked for an excuse to wink at the audience and let them know the *real* Jimmy Stewart would never do such things. There was nothing stylized about him, as was the case with almost every other icon of Hollywood's golden age—think of Humphrey Bogart's brooding way with a cigarette, Clark Gable's rat-a-tat voice, the bizarre cadences of John Wayne and Gary Cooper, and almost everything about James Cagney and Cary Grant. At his best, James Stewart was the great American film actor the way Astaire was the great American dancer and Sinatra the great American singer: He had no visible technique. You never saw the work.

That is especially true in his sexiest scene, which may be the single sexiest scene on film. It is part of his greatest performance, which may be the greatest single performance by an American actor. The movie is *It's a Wonderful Life*, and in the scene Stewart is standing next to Donna Reed as the two participate in a long-distance call on an old-fashioned phone.

Stewart is George Bailey, a banker who has wanted nothing since his childhood but to leave the small town where he was born and raised to explore the world. This night, for the third time in his adulthood, he has found himself trapped there by circumstances beyond his control; it is now clear to him that he will never get away. Depressed and despairing, angry and bitter, he finds himself in the parlor of the girl who has always loved him. She puts on a recording of a song they once sang together; he ignores her; she tells him to leave; he goes; she smashes the record; he comes back in, having forgotten his hat. The phone rings. It's the town's rich kid, who's calling from New York to flirt with the girl and pass on a tip about a hot business venture. As they stand close together, listening, George breathes in her scent as she breathes in his. Finally the friend says he is giving them a chance to get in on the ground floor of what could be the chance of a lifetime. George, in a rage, throws the phone down, grabs her by the shoulders, and, almost sobbing, tells her he doesn't want any ground floors, any big chances, and

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he doesn't want to get married, ever; she bursts into tears, and he embraces her, kisses her passionately, and weeps himself, surrendering to his unwanted destiny.

George Bailey is the least ordinary character Stewart ever played. He is, as the movie's villain says, "the smartest one in the bunch," a clever and resourceful man with a generous nature. And for most of the movie, he is utterly miserable. He never gets to do what he wants. He is tormented by the thought that he is a failure, that his ambitions are greater than his abilities. Suffocated by a life he does not yet know is wonderful, he is on the verge of committing suicide when he is given a chance to see what the world would have been like without him.

And what he learns is not that he is ordinary, but that he is great. Because of him, hundreds of lives have been saved, his family kept from ruin, his wife kept from spinsterhood, his hometown kept from moral degradation. George Bailey is no American Everyman. He is a hero. What made James Stewart the most beloved of Hollywood icons is that, alone among them, he gave us an unvarnished image of a singularly American greatness. ♦

I Fear Ike

The 1950s as Age of Anxiety

By Lawrence F. Kaplan

The historian Jakob Burckhardt once observed that "history is what one age finds worthy of note in another." Judging from a number of books that have appeared in the 1990s, it is the popular culture of past decades—in particular, that of the 1950s—that our current age finds worthy of note. The recent literature on the 1950s combines an enduring interest in that decade's pop culture with yet another aspect of American history to which our age is attached: the presence of injustice and oppression. *Life Under a Cloud*, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, *In the Shadow of War*, *The Way We Never Were*, *Young, White, and Miserable*—these are but a few of the titles that seek to debunk the popular image of the '50s as an idyllic era. The latest addition to this catalogue is Margot A. Henriksen's *Dr. Strangelove's America*. It may also be the silliest.

Margot A. Henriksen
Dr. Strangelove's America
Society and Culture in the Atomic Age
University of California, 392 pp., $34.95

Henriksen's 1950s fits comfortably into the Hula-Hoops-and-howitzers mold, all too familiar by now. Even during the period itself, critics like David Riesman and Lewis Mumford could be heard attacking the "sleepwalker's insulation from reality that characterizes our collective conduct," as Mumford put it. It is an age of anxiety and repression, in which fear of the atom bomb addicts the middle class to a steady diet of candy-coated cultural fare. Seeking "safety and security through material comfort and mental conformity," in Henriksen's words, American families decamp for Levittown and settle into the saccharine spirit of the times. *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave It to Beaver* provide an escape for many from the unpleasant realities of life in the atomic age. Others cope by mowing the lawn, donning 3-D glasses, and stuffing themselves into telephone booths. But the optimistic flavor of the era's pop culture cannot fully mask what Henriksen describes as the "increasingly horrific quality of life in America."

Thankfully, the banality of evil was recognized by a select few, most of whom happened to be Hollywood producers. Thus was born a "culture of dissent," which would conflict with, and eventually overpower, the period's "culture of consensus." Henriksen's culture of dissent features the likes of Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Rod Serling, as well as films that allegedly suggest a fear of nuclear Armageddon, like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing*. But the author also identifies pop icons such as Elvis Presley, James Dean, and Jerry Lee Lewis as participants in the revolt against "atomic age values."

As the Eisenhower decade drags on, efforts by the dissenting culture to break through the "cold and inhuman rationalism" of Cold War America gain steam. "Like Norman Bates's split personality, . . . 1950's America revealed a conflict that could not remain trapped in an underground culture of dissent." That conflict finally bubbles to the surface of the American psyche with the release of Stanley Kubrick's masterly 1963 film, *Dr. Strangelove*. Henriksen writes, "The subversive laughter of Dr. Strangelove betokened an era of catharsis and awakening in which cultural dissent enlivened its response to match the equally enlivened thermonuclear activism of the consensus culture." The film captured "a higher and perhaps surreal truth about life in the atomic age."

After *Dr. Strangelove*, our culture could freely acknowledge America's

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"reality of death and violence." And beginning with 1967's *Bonnie and Clyde*, it did so in an increasingly frank manner. Nor did television remain immune to a recognition that the arrogant complacency of the atomic age could not be sustained. Thus, in the author's opinion, it is telling that the Cleavers and the Nelsons were knocked out of prime time by "mutated" families like the Addamses and the Munsters. The story, as we already know, ends happily. By the late 1960s, the pop culture of dissent has triumphed.

The weakness of the Henriksen book is the weakness of cultural history as it is conceived today. The rise of "cultural studies," with its deconstructionist baggage, impenetrable jargon, and postmodern contempt for the historical method, has crippled a once-vibrant subdiscipline. Like most other recent volumes of cultural history, this book does not properly qualify as a work of history. It is, rather, a collection of critical vignettes that tells us more about the 1990s than the 1950s. Typically, in her discussion of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Henriksen writes, "The microcosmic world of the Bates Motel suggested the triumph of despair and death in an insane age. . . . Marion Crane's murder recalled the terms and language of the civil defense warning about being 'virtually naked' to enemy attack, about avoiding the 'deadly shower' of radioactive fallout." That Hitchcock never ascribed such a meaning to the scene matters little to the author. This is contemporary cultural criticism, where artistic intent takes a back seat to the *Zeitgeist* of whatever era one happens to be examining.

In turn, what little history Henriksen does present reads like scholastic film theory. Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs are forced "to bear the brunt of America's atomic paranoia," while Elia Kazan and Edward Teller are cast as villains. Students protesting the war in Vietnam "put themselves in danger in order to expose the violence of the system," while American soldiers spend their days killing women and children. No such work would be complete without the requisite discussion of similarities between the United States ("a criminal and immoral state") and Nazi Germany, and Margot A. Henriksen does not disappoint: She devotes the better part of her chapter "Attacking the Menace of the American System" to an examination of their many parallels.

The author's insufferable didacticism leads her to vastly oversimplify the contrasting tempers of the '50s and '60s. By depicting the former decade as "bad" and the latter as "good," Henriksen merely reverses the equally facile tendency to cast the '50s as a utopian age. She defines culture as "a battle between order and disorder" and clings to the image of the '50s as a titanic struggle between righteous dissenters and a conformist pop culture. For the most part, however, the two cultures—the Abstract Expressionists, Sylvia Plath, and *Playhouse 90* in one camp, Norman Rockwell, Herman Wouk, and *Make Room for Daddy* in the other—coexisted quite nicely.

Though a genuine counterculture did exist during the 1950s, it is not at all clear that its dissent extended beyond a restlessness with middle-class norms to a sustained protest against atomic weapons. J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* was not, as the author maintains, a cry for world

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peace, and *Rebel Without a Cause* and *The Wild One* were not in the least concerned with atomic-age perils. If these films and others described by Henriksen tell us anything about the era's youth culture, it is that its dissent was a product of boredom and, for the most part, aimless. (Says an inquirer to Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*, "What are you rebelling against?" Answers Brando, "What do you got?")

Nor was the optimism of the culture that the dissenters tweaked necessarily a consequence of "atomic anxiety." The burgeoning middle class that Henriksen so reviles was justifiably tired of gloom. If its children were not, that is only because they had not endured the suffering of their elders. The United States had just emerged from a depression and a decade of wars in which 350,000 of its sons perished. In the 1950s, the economy surged, people bought houses, and they trusted their president. So what if they preferred *Father Knows Best* to *The Naked and the Dead*?

Neither did the explosion of the dissenting culture in the 1960s owe much to a fear of nuclear Armageddon. The culture of dissent went mainstream not because of a heightened sensitivity to the dangers of the arms race—the specter of atomic war had receded considerably by the late '60s—but because of the war in Vietnam. Yet that is plain history, not cultural history.

In Henriksen's version of the 1960s, life imitates art. The culture of dissent frees itself from its atomic-age shackles, and society follows suit. It is an interesting contention, if by now a conventional one. It is far more interesting, in fact, than would be a simple accounting of how Hollywood sought to capitalize on a period of social unrest that had little to do with fear of the atom bomb. Yet Henriksen, herself a member of a consensus culture, prefers not to dissent from current scholarly wisdom in her field. The Ozzies and Harriets of today's academia will surely approve. ♦

Nietzsche Returns

Thus Spake Karl Löwith

By Mark Blitz

Karl Löwith
(J. Harvey Lomax, translator)
Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same
University of California, 304 pp., $40

Forty years ago, few American professors of philosophy or political philosophy read Friedrich Nietzsche or took him seriously. Healthy common sense rebelled against paying much attention to effusive and unsystematic writers; it also rebelled against careful study of authors linked to the Nazis. Today, however, a new book about Nietzsche seems to be published every month. And many of these treat Nietzsche not as a figure in an intellectual wax museum, but as a thinker with something true, or uncommonly significant, to say. At the least, many authors worry that others will believe this.

Is this attention to Nietzsche good or bad? One alternates between morally decrying Nietzsche's nihilism, with the implication that he should not be allowed to corrupt his readers, and intellectually decrying the assimilation of Nietzsche's teaching to easygoing relativism, with the implication that his democratic readers should not be allowed to corrupt or debase him. The study of such an explosive figure requires a sober and serious guide.

The virtue of Karl Löwith is that he is such a guide; his limitation is that he is not at the same time a sufficiently passionate or even playful one. Löwith was a contemporary of Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, and the other young students who worked with Martin Heidegger after the end of the First World War. Although Löwith lived and taught in the United States for a decade (he returned to Germany to teach at Heidelberg during the 1950s and died in 1973), his influence here has never been especially great. *From Hegel to Nietzsche* and *Meaning in History* were once widely read, and they are still studied. But the student who will recognize the names of Arendt and Strauss may not recognize the name Löwith at all.

Harvey Lomax's fine translation of Löwith's *Nietzsche's Philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same* will deservedly give Löwith renewed attention here. Löwith's book was among the first to take Nietzsche seriously as a philosopher, and was almost alone at the time in trying to uncover what Nietzsche himself intended to say. "This book does not impose an interpretation from without," Löwith writes, "but rather extracts it from the Nietzschean texts."

For Löwith, what is most significant in Nietzsche is his effort to overcome the nihilism he believes to be at the core of the West from Socrates onward. The heart of Nietzsche's attempt to overcome nihilism without flinching from it is his doctrine of the "eternal recurrence of the same." What is eternal return? Nietzsche argues that everything that is, high and low, will return just as it was innumerable times. He believes this, or wishes to believe this, for two reasons. One is his claim that the combination of infinite time and a

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finite number of physical events means that everything sooner or later must reappear identically. Instead of helping to offset nihilism, however, this teaching seems to exacerbate it by making human effort pointless and empty. Nietzsche tries to turn this apparent difficulty into an advantage. For if one could make oneself responsible for what recurs by willing and affirming it, one would be justifying and embracing all that is otherwise meaningless. So, Nietzsche argues, believing the truth of eternal return is, in fact, necessary if nihilism is to be surpassed.

Löwith discusses at length the various formulae or images through which Nietzsche attempts to clarify the possibility of willing eternal return, largely by explaining various scenes and images in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In Löwith's judgment, Nietzsche's efforts are unsuccessful.

One difficulty, which Löwith does not emphasize, is that because the value of eternal return is affirmed arbitrarily but not discovered reflectively, it cannot in the last analysis be the serious guide that choice and meaning require. What one knows to be a willed assertion can be replaced by a different assertion at another time. Like a light in a tunnel, a willed affirmation can show the way ahead, but it will never be able fully to block out the broader illumination that reveals its limits.

It is true that love, or acquiescence to one's heritage, is part of what gives direction to a family or a people. But such "irrational" attachment to what guides us also includes a view that our pursuits are reasonable and worthwhile, and not merely the product of our tradition or our inexplicable decisions. In any event, such local attachments would be insufficient for Nietzsche. He seeks a "philosopher of the future" able to overcome what is comfortable and immediate and to affirm not just this or that thing but all things, despite the lack of rational or transcendent standards.

Löwith's main argument is that if one believes eternal return is a demonstrable scientific truth, the decision to affirm any and every event as something that will reappear again and again in all its glory and misery hardly seems necessary. The affirmation does not make one "responsible"; it just means that one is acknowledging a fact. Löwith, however, leaves it at pointing out this problem; he does not try to engage Nietzsche by seeing how he might overcome, or might be made to overcome, the difficulty.

One may conclude from these issues that affirming the recurrence of each event as eternally necessary is, finally, an act of insincerity: It can never take the place of pursuing goals that attract our passionate attention and whose nature we seek to uncover and understand. Rather than overcoming nihilism while still affirming the death of what is transcendent, the attempt to will eternal return shows the continued need for, and in this sense the continued allure of, the unchanging ends that nihilism denies. For Nietzsche, the possibility of affirming eternal return is inseparable from the arguments through which he tries to show that nihilism is the dominant truth of contemporary life. Therefore, if the act of affirming eternal return is neither morally nor logically authentic, one is justified in questioning the primacy and inevitability of nihilism. ♦

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The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

July 1, 1997, Tuesday, Tues day 85 Transcript #5849

LEHRER: And now we go to our essayist Roger Rosenblatt, who has been meditating on the deeper meanings of the Tyson-Holyfield boxing match and its aftermath.

ROSENBLATT: The other night I watched as a wood thrush flicked his beak with graceful precision at a passing minnow under moonlight's graceful glimmer across a Southampton inlet. At that very moment, 2,000 miles to the west as the web-footed warbler flies, a hulking figure sank his firm and rocklike incisors into the ear of the reigning champion of heavyweight boxing. The mind is jarred by such contrasts—between the gentility of my Long Island milieu and the manly gore of boxing's shameful fury. And yet my thoughts are drawn again and again to such opposites because I am an essayist of quiet sensitivity, and the mirage of cunning contrasts serves to fog the essential vaporousness of my runaway prose.

And yet my words flow on, burbling with boring eloquence, rippling over your ears like a dulcet song of genteel soundlessness, and I sense you nodding at my commentary with sweet self-approval. We are worthy, you and I, and having dozed through the roundtable discussion on telecom reform we can finish our hour of edification with my own humble offering, secure in the knowledge that we shall both forget everything I say the second it passes through our ears, and all that will be left will be the polite aroma of civilized discourse.

But Evander Holyfield, who is the alleged subject of this tergiversation, will have to cock his head leftward to hear the effervescence of my observations, as his right lobe languishes in its sad diminution. Yet, upon reflection, who are we to cast blame on Michael Tyson, the man, once champion, who says he "snapped" in the midst of that confrontation, presumably upon realizing that his name lacked the mellifluous grace of his opponent's, Evander. I myself have snapped under similar circumstances, weighted down by the vulgarization of discourse, the guilt that subsumes all of us associated with the American colossus, and during fund-raising weeks. On such occasions I have snapped off the heads of asparagus with vigor sufficient to endanger my dental work. For there is a beast in all of us, a rage at the impersonality of postindustrial society. And above us all, Evander and Mike, you and I, Gergen and Shields and Gigot, the wood thrush soars in winged testament to the truth that this, even this, this too, like every other commentary I deliver, shall pass.

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